

Future Directions in Feminist Phenomenology
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario
May 23-25, 2013
David Chu International Centre, WSS 2130

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Thursday May 23, 9:30 a.m.

A Phenomenological-existential Understanding of our Being-in-the-world: Trans((subj)(obj))ectivity

ABSTRACT

My work, be it grounded in Nietzsche, Sartre, Beauvoir, or others, is informed by a desire to understand the human being's presence in the world and seek to establish grounds for an ethics of flourishing. I fail to be convinced by traditional rationalistic philosophy that paints a portrait of the relation between individual and world as straightforward and easily conceived. Rather, I look at the works of existentialists and phenomenologists, as well as structuralists and post-structuralists, for their attempt to come to terms with what is, after all, a messy relation between human and world. In this context, investigating the "nature" of the human agent, the "being for whom being is in question" as Heidegger would have it, becomes imperative. In opposition to Descartes' "thinking substance" that encounters the material world, existentialists and phenomenologists uncover a being that is an embodied intentional consciousness entangled with the world. Their take on the subject is that there is much more to this subject than mere rational thinking.

Beauvoir's philosophy offers us possibilities to re-think the notion of subjectivity through the feminist phenomenology she presents in *The Second Sex* but also in earlier works such as *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Beauvoir is preoccupied with the question of intersubjectivity, ambiguity, ethics and, eventually, politics. She presents a view of the human being as fundamentally ambiguous and holds a view of alterity and intersubjective relations that opens up to a feminist ethics and politics in which interpersonal relations are dramatically re-assessed and posited in terms of reciprocity and the mutual flourishing of freedom. The work accomplished by Beauvoir in that relation has inspired contemporary feminist thinkers such as Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti who think with and beyond Beauvoir in trying to address the way the individual lives in the world. While Grosz will insist on notions of volatile and porous subjectivity, Braidotti will focus on the subject as nomadic, the fluid and hybrid. These exacerbate the Beauvoirian notion of ambiguity by exploring its limits and attempting to move beyond them.

Picking up on their work, and exploring views offered by Foucault, Latour and Sloterdijk, I try to flesh out a notion of the individual as a trans((subj)(obj))ective being. As an ambiguous intentional consciousness that is a porous fold in transit, human subjectivity shapes and is shaped by its interactions not only with other human subjectivities but with the world as a whole and in its parts. The human being is caught in a web of intersubjectivity and interobjectivity, but because it is a subject in transit, I prefer to speak of transsubjectivity and

transobjectivity. Thus the human being is this web that I wish to call *trans((subj)(obj))ectivity*. It is caught in this web and it is itself this ambiguous web. Understanding the human being in this way and with a feminist lens has important ethical and political implications and calls for new ways of conceiving interpersonal relations. Thus, feminist phenomenology can help us both make sense of our being-in-the-world and shape our future through the new ethical and political landscape it grounds.